Young Adults Academy – written evidence (CCE0129)

This consultation response was produced with input from young attendees of the Young Adults Academy (YAA) and we are grateful for the opportunity to provide a response to these extremely important questions. YAA is a joint initiative between Model Westminster and the Young Adults Forum, two not-for-profit organisations working to develop the political empowerment of young people. See Appendix A for more details about these organisations and contact details.

The YAA is designed to be a fun, dynamic and thought provoking three-day event, run during University/School breaks, to provide young people with a free opportunity to gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to engage with and contribute to tackling the most challenging political and policy questions of our time.

As part of the recent YAA (9-11 August 2017) attendees were asked to deliberate in groups and draft responses to selected questions from the consultation. There were 15 attendees between the ages of 16-24 from a diverse background. The groups agreed to focus on questions 1, 4, 5, 7, 8 & 9 and the responses are focused on their implications for young people.

Questions & Responses

1. What does citizenship and civic engagement mean in the 21st century? Why does it matter, and how does it relate to questions of identity?

   - **21st Citizenship** matters as the story of UK history is one of the expansion and strengthening of the rights and responsibilities of citizens.
   - **Civic Engagement** involves the ways and extent to which citizens can influence and make a difference to their communities.
   - Young people are accustomed to exercising more influence, control and choice in their lives. They expect to be able to do so in the provision, quality and delivery of public services and public policy development. But there needs to be time and resources devoted to empowering them with the knowledge, skills and confidence for this.

**Recommendation 1**
It is vital that that young people receive practical political education aimed at understanding both their rights and responsibilities and how these have strengthened over the centuries. Furthermore, they need practical education around the ways they can influence politics and public policy.

4. Do current laws encourage active political engagement? What are your views on changes to the franchise for national or local elections, including lowering the voting age? Should changes be made to the voting process or the voting registration process?

   - Historically speaking, young people between 18 – 25 have the lowest turnout for elections and it’s important to understand why turnout for this group is so low.
   - Many young people have strong beliefs about equality and justice. They are political, yet many do not vote due to disillusionment, confusion and frustration over ‘Westminster Politics’. They find alternative ways to express their political views through social media and other mechanisms.
Recomendation 2.
Developing political engagement should start at school, where young people should be encouraged to exercise their vote, and enabled to develop ‘political skills’ like debating, campaigning, negotiating, critical analysis and volunteering.

5. What should be the role of education in teaching and encouraging good citizenship? At what stages, from primary school through to university, should it be (a) available, and (b) compulsory? Should there be any exemptions? Should there be more emphasis on political participation, both inside and outside classes? How effective is current teaching? Do the curriculum and the qualifications that are currently offered need amending?

- Political education should begin at school and should be compulsory as part of Citizenship development. Political skills, like debating, campaigning, influencing and building relationships are key skills that young people should be encouraged to develop at school
- School should provide a safe space to discuss and debate political ideas.
- Young people should understand the rights and obligations that they have as UK Citizens.

Recommendation 3.
The school curriculum should include space for young people to develop political knowledge, experience and skills. For example, running a student election or campaign or such. Developing political skills like campaigning, influencing, negotiation, debating are also key soft skills in any career.

7. How can society support civic engagement? What responsibility should central government, devolved and local governments, third sector organisations and the individual have for encouraging civic engagement? What can the Government and Parliament do to support civil society initiatives to increase civic engagement?

- Central government, devolved and local governments, third sector organisations and the individual all share responsibility to encourage civic engagement. It would be counterproductive if only National or local Government were to encourage civic engagement without 3rd sector organisations playing a key role.
- The key is not who provides the political education. It could be charities who come into schools to provide the service. However, it is vital that Government allocates space, time and funding within the education system to foster civic engagement. What is important is that there are many providers within the space who can deliver programmes around political knowledge, skills and engagement.
- Of huge importance is that grass roots organisations are supported as they often have significant local by in and reach.

Recommendation 4.
Local and national Government should allocate space, time and funding within the school education system to foster civic engagement. The provider need not be the school itself and could be a local charity or volunteer organisation that comes in to promote civic engagement.

8. What are the values that all of us who live in Britain should share and support? Can you identify any threats to these values, which affect the citizenship of, for instance, women or various minority groups? If so, how can their citizenship be strengthened?
British values include a belief in Human Rights and their protection. Values also include freedom of speech and tolerance. While there are many countries that would sign up to similar values as the UK, it’s about which values are prioritised in the UK.

Recommendation 5
Political Education for young people should include British Values; how they emerged and evolved in the UK. It should also emphasise why they are important, and when and why they are not absolute. For example, where the value of freedom of speech clashes with valuing the right to protection from hate speech and discrimination.

9. Why do so many communities and groups feel “left behind”? Are there any specific factors which act as barriers to active citizenship faced by different communities or groups - white, BME, young, old, rural, urban? How might these barriers be overcome?

- Communities feel left behind when they feel that their voices or their concerns do not matter to those who govern them.
- This is especially the case for young people who often feel frustrated with UK politics. They feel they can’t make a difference, it’s confusing, distant and boring.

Recommendation 6
Citizenship and political education at school should encourage and include ways to engage with politics and policy making. For example, submitting consultation responses. From the local and national Government side, efforts should be made visit schools to promote engagement in key political and policy making areas. There could be a real role for Select Committees here.

Appendix A

Model Westminster
Model Westminster is a non-partisan, non-profit educational enterprise, run and managed by volunteers, on a mission to improve the political empowerment of young people. We do this by running fun interactive educational events that bring together different experts to give talks on various political and policy making topics. The goal of these events is to empower young people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to understand and influence politics and policy making. Our fun and interactive events also provide an opportunity for young people to develop skills in critical thinking, debating, presentation and group work. **Contact:** Grant Fisher, Director of Model Westminster

Young Adults Forum
The Young Adults Forum aims to both challenge government on UK legislation, raise awareness on current issues, and inspire the next generation of politically minded individuals. We want to motivate and engage young adults, in the making of new laws and legislation. **Contact:** Richard Kays, Director of the Young Adults Forum

*8 September 2017*